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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SKOPJE 000418

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STATE FOR EUR/SCE, USNATO FOR DOUG JONES

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/29/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MK](#)

SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION CONCLUDE
POLITICAL AGREEMENT, OPPOSITION WILL RETURN TO PARLIAMENT

REF: A. SKOPJE 397 AND PREVIOUS

[1](#)B. SKOPJE 415

Classified By: P/E CHIEF SHUBLER, REASONS 1.4(b) & (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Governing VMRO-DPMNE and eAlbanian main opposition party DUI concluded a U.S.-EU-brokered political agreement on May 29 that addresses DUI's key policy concerns and paves the way for that party's return to Parliament May 30. Governing coalition partner DPA, angered over DUI's inflated claim that the agreement meets all its demands (it does not) threatened over the May 26-27 weekend to pull out of the coalition. Following a May 27 meeting between PM Gruevski and DPA VP Thaci, DPA's position softened and the coalition does not seem threatened. The conclusion of the agreement, and DUI's announced return to Parliament, represent positive steps toward demonstrating the country's political maturity as a NATO candidate. Now the hard work begins, as DUI and the government face the practical challenges of implementing the agreement, and as Gruevski determines how to deal with what are certain to be Thaci's demands to compensate for the attention VMRO-DPMNE focused on DUI in the political dialogue process that led to the May 29 agreement. End summary.

POLITICAL AGREEMENT CONCLUDED

[1](#)2. (C) In a simple ceremony that capped nearly three months of U.S. and EUSR-brokered negotiations, governing VMRO-DPMNE leader and Prime Minister Gruevski and main eAlbanian opposition DUI President Ahmeti concluded an agreement May 29 on a 5-point text that addresses DUI's key concerns (ref A) and paves the way for DUI's return to Parliament. The agreement, facilitated by the Embassy and EUSR, addresses the use of Badinter (double majority) voting for legislation that directly affects minority interests. It also commits Gruevski to recomposing the Parliamentary Inter-ethnic Relations Committee that is empowered to determine whether draft legislation must be passed with a Badinter vote.

[1](#)3. (SBU) In more general terms, the two parties also agreed to work toward passage of a law governing the use of languages, and to address the provision of social and material benefits for victims of the 2001 conflict, including eAlbanian insurgents who fought against government forces.

In a final concession to DUI, Gruevski agreed to continue discussions on the method of government composition, a sop to Ahmeti's insistence that future governments be composed using the Badinter principle.

14. (C) With mid-level Embassy and EUSR observers present, Gruevski and Ahmeti reviewed the text and shook hands to conclude the agreement, originals of which will be held by the U.S. and EUSR. In deference to Gruevski's desire to avoid the appearance of having concluded a second Framework Agreement, Ahmeti agreed not to insist on having both leaders sign the document. Following the conclusion of the agreement, the two leaders issued a joint press statement, which was followed by a joint U.S.-EU press statement welcoming the positive development.

DUI WILL RETURN TO PARLIAMENT MAY 30

15. (SBU) DUI VP Teuta Arifi informed us May 28 that the party's Executive Committee had decided to support the agreement and DUI's return to Parliament. After the May 29 meeting with Gruevski, Ahmeti confirmed that the party would return to Parliament on May 30, ending a several-month boycott that began after DUI accused the government of working to undermine implementation of the 2001 Ohrid Framework Agreement (FWA). Working groups on the language law and the victims of conflict issue, comprised of VMRO-DPMNE and DUI members, with Embassy and EUSR representatives as observers for initial meetings, will convene on May 31. Participation in the working groups gradually will widen to include other parties in the Parliament.

BUMP IN THE ROAD -- COALITION PARTNER THREATENS TO LEAVE

SKOPJE 00000418 002 OF 002

GOVERNMENT

16. (SBU) Reacting to a May 25 BBC news interview Ahmeti gave in which he exaggeratedly claimed the government had met all his demands in the text of the agreement, eAlbanian governing coalition partner DPA's VP Menduh Thaci stunned the government with a public announcement May 26 that DPA would leave the coalition. In a litany of grievances, the impetuous Thaci claimed Gruevski had kept him in the dark regarding the details of the political agreement, complained of a lack of coordination between eMacedonian and eAlbanian officials in the planning and execution of a recent police raid (ref B), and accused the government of hampering implementation of the FWA.

17. (C) Gruevski, annoyed that Thaci had not given prior warning of his intentions, nevertheless met with the DPA Vice President on May 27 to allow him to air his grievances. According to Gruevski's Chief of Staff, the meeting was constructive and resulted in the clarification of some of Thaci's concerns. On May 28, DPA President Arben Xhaferi reassured OSCE representatives that the situation was not as gloomy as it had seemed over the weekend, and that Thaci had "had one of his weak moments" when he threatened to pull out of the coalition. Local press reports on May 29 suggested the storm had blown over, and that the coalition would hold.

COMMENT: NOW THE HARD WORK BEGINS

18. (C) The conclusion of the political agreement between VMRO-DPMNE and DUI, and DUI's intent to return to Parliament this week, are positive developments that will help demonstrate Macedonia's developing political maturity and help strengthen its credential as a NATO candidate. The next chapter in this story is going to be more difficult, however, as DUI is forced to work within parliamentary channels, with the government, to implement the terms of the agreement. In addition, DPA's Thaci is likely to act as a spoiler -- his threat to leave the coalition was clearly intended to give him maximum leverage for extracting concessions from the

government, and to raise his and DPA's profile as the party approaches its June 30 congress. Gruevski will have to balance the need to uphold his end of the deal with DUI against the need to avoid alienating DPA's Thaci.

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